

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
22 November 1982

TODAY'S TOPIC: A New Demand for Experts on the Soviet Union  
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WASHINGTON

STAT

These are heady days for America's Kremlinologists.

During the current Soviet leadership shakeup, U.S. government and academic specialists in the murky world of Kremlin personalities and policy-making have found their talents in greater demand than at any time since the 1960s.

Jerry F. Hough, a Duke University political scientist, said that in the first few days after Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev died Nov. 10 he received more than 30 calls from newspapers and broadcast stations requesting interviews.

"As soon as I put the phone down it would be ringing again," said Hough, who has drawn wide attention for his provocative hypothesis that Yuri V. Andropov, the former KGB chief succeeding Brezhnev as Communist Party leader, may be a "closet liberal" amenable to sweeping economic reforms.

While analysts at the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency worked long hours poring over classified cable traffic, other Soviet-watchers ranging from former U.S. envoys to once-imprisoned dissidents have gone before television cameras to discuss the end of the Brezhnev era.

This visibility contrasts sharply with the near-obscurity that engulfed many Kremlinologists during the past decade, once Brezhnev had consolidated his power and Soviet political change seemed to proceed slowly.

However, the current surge of attention toward events in Moscow also has intensified concern over the long-term adequacy of this country's brainpower pool for analyzing the Soviet Union and forecasting Soviet behavior around the globe.

Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., notes that although many American experts had predicted there would be a considerable delay, the 68-year-old Andropov was named to succeed Brezhnev swiftly.

Pointing to the range of assessments about Andropov voiced by American Soviet-watchers, Lugar asserted: "The lack of much depth and certainty in any of the analyses shows a glaring gap in our relations with the Soviet Union."

"The unfortunate and dangerous fact of the matter is that we really don't know that much about the one foreign nation which constitutes the greatest threat to our democratic and economic freedoms," he said in a statement.

Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Europe, said he hopes the Kremlin changeover will help accelerate congressional action on legislation he has introduced to establish a \$50 million federal endowment for Soviet studies in the United States.

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